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Protect and survive

The chance that a suncream labelled with a sun protection factor of 30 actually delivers an SPF considerably *below* 30 is 80 per cent. In short, according to the US watchdog magazine Consumer Report, suncream doesn't always do exactly what it says on the bottle.

In theory, the SPF system is simplicity itself. An SPF of 15 means that you are giving your skin 15 times the protection it would have without any cream at all. The problem with this is that sun damage is cumulative and will occur even without any signs of burning, which is why the top manufacturers, like Australian company SunSense, agree that the best advice of all is to avoid sun exposure between 11am and 3pm, and stick to a sunscreen that protects from both UVA and UVB rays.

If you do spend a lot of time in the sun, you are likely to develop quite serious problems. Skin cancer is now the second most common form of cancer in the UK, with about 50,000 new cases a year and an annual mortality rate of about 2,000. And don't assume

that just slapping on the sunscreen will suffice: even the highest factors let small amounts of radiation through.

However, it's not all doom and gloom: applying good-quality olive oil to your skin after sunbathing really can help protect you against skin cancer, according to preliminary findings from a team of Japanese scientists.



Main picture from Katz; Laser Vortex by Hamo Thornycroft/Marine Photography; illustration by Andy Lovell